

Gifted Newsletter

Second Quarter Events 2019-2020

As part of our school-wide initiatives to meet the needs of all learners, teachers continue to incorporate both Performance Based Learning and writing in all classrooms. Particular focus was given to Writing Across the Curriculum in our December Faculty Meeting. Members of the School Improvement Committee gave refresher training on our schoolwide writing tools and introduced paragraph frames and open ended extenders as ways to support our writers in their clarity of writing and depth of thinking. In the coming months, the SIT committee will address areas identified by faculty members as needing support, in order to continue our school's goal to incorporate writing and writing instruction into all content areas.

Extracurricular and Contest News

- **American Mathematics Contest 8:** On November 13th, 33 LDMS 7th and 8th graders traveled to VMI to participate in the American Mathematics Contest 8. The goal of the AMC contest is to increase interest in mathematics and to develop problem-solving skills through a fun and challenging competition. In addition to taking the contest, students attended a math presentation by COL Greg Hartman on the mathematics behind the best angle of trajectory and the distance a satellite needs to be from earth for its given purpose. Thanks to Jen Hall for both providing preparation materials and hosting two morning and two afternoon study sessions for students; thanks also to parent volunteers for chaperoning and helping with the study sessions.
- **Lexington Women's Club Writing Contest:** Outstanding Downing writers submitted writing pieces to the Women's Club Writing Contest in December. Interested writers attended four after school sessions with Mrs. Mayo, Mr. Golladay, and Mrs. Joyner to workshop their writing pieces. At least five of our 6th, 7th and 8th grade students submitted the poetry or prose pieces that they developed. We look forward to learning the results of this contest in the coming months.
- **Science Fair Club:** Three students are working with Mrs. Swenty, Mrs. Sanders, Mr. Clark and Mrs. Joyner to prepare for the regional fair at JMU on March 10th. These students have designed their experiments, carried out research, and are readying their findings to share with LDMS students and local Science experts before the regional fair.
- Two new STEM opportunities for 2020 are below:
 - **Bridge Building Competition** (*sponsored by Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)*): In this event, students develop a truss Bridge to be tested for strength-to-weight ratio. Student teams from grades 7 and 8 will be competing against other student teams from around the Richmond Metro area. We are practicing and designing to build our truss bridge after school on Wednesdays. The competition will be Saturday, April 18th, 2020 at Hermitage High School in Henrico County, Virginia. Any student in grades 7 or 8 is welcome to join the competition. Please let Mrs. Swenty know if you are interested.
 - **Early Bird Council with Boxerwood:** Early Bird Council is a collection of 10 students who applied and meet once a week at 7:30 AM with Ms. Swenty, Ms. Sanders and Ms. Elise Sheffield from Boxerwood. The Council aims to help LDMS become more earth friendly by reducing waste, saving energy, and protecting wildlife. The council's meetings will culminate with an Environmental Youth Summit in conjunction with Maury River Middle School students at Kendall at the end of February. In this meeting students will collaborate

with local community members on solutions to local environmental problems in Rockbridge County, Virginia and beyond.

- **National History Day:** LDMS National History Day students are continuing to work on their research projects. Three students have been working after school with Mrs. Conway and Mrs. Cox in order to ready their individual projects for the district National History Day competition at UVA in March.
- **Jacob's Ladder Enrichment Program:** LDMS has one participant in the Jacob's Ladder Enrichment Program. Mrs. Becky Smith has helped shepherd this student in the prestigious program for at risk gifted youth. The program begins supporting students in 4th or 5th grade, includes summer activities to help support success through school, and continues to follow these students through high school. 95% of Jacob's Ladder participants go on to college.

Curricular News

- This quarter sixth grade English classes immersed themselves in preparation for hosting the Veterans Tea by studying the various branches of the military, preparing to converse with various veterans, and engaging in round table discussions. Following the event, writers chose prompts from a menu: short story(historical fiction), biographical sketch, poetry, vocabulary extensions, and narrative reflections
- In 6th grade math, several students are working on extension projects. In these the students are applying use of ratios and learning scale factor to complete the activities about landmarks.
- In World History, eighth graders researched ancient architecture and created a visual representation of their choice. Some outstanding examples included the Circus Maximus built out of Rice Krispie treats, a 3-D printed Pantheon, a Roman temple built in Minecraft, and beautiful drawings of ancient buildings. Many of these are currently on display in the upper hallway alcove.
- Civics students in both Mrs. Conway and Mrs. Cox's classes prepared for the 2019 midterm elections by researching state and local candidates and creating their own campaign materials for these candidates. Their projects- including posters, school-wide announcements, and information boards- were used to inform other students about the candidates in preparation for our school-wide mock election on Tuesday November 5.
- US History students recently completed their persuasive essays explaining why a historical figure from the Progressive and WWI era deserves to be on a stamp. The essays will be mailed to the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee who helps determine what topics are made into USPS postage stamps. The mock stamps designed by 6th graders are decorating the new bulletin board in the lower hallway.
- LDMS life science students were very busy learning about cells, cell transport, photosynthesis, cell respiration, genetics and heredity in 2nd quarter. Mrs. Swenty's students concluded their unit on cells by demonstrating their understanding of cells through a detailed cell project which they chose from a list of ideas (or came up with on their own!). The projects ranged from written (and performed!) songs to interactive children's books and everything in between. They completed labs including an osmosis lab involving gummy bears and an exercise lab in which students investigated their individual cell respiration capabilities. Before second quarter ended, students studied genetics and heredity in depth. This unit concluded with a Genetic Smiley lab where students "created" their own smiley face "child" from a list of traits their child had "inherited". Students in Ms. Sanders 2nd period Life Science class answered questions posed by the students such as, "How many cells are in a flu vaccine?" (Answer: none; cells are used to make vaccines but aren't in the vaccine) and "How many cells are in the human body?" (Answer: 37.2 trillion). Answers are on the display board for students to see. Also, during a cell project, some students showed off their analytical skills by

producing a cell model that compares cells to a school or a garden. Other students wrote a song about the cell organelles.

- Eighth grade physical science students finished up the chemistry unit by becoming an expert on a particular element from the periodic table of the elements. Each student chose an element to research and write about and we made our own life size periodic table of the elements in the hallway to share with all of LDMS. After transitioning into physics, students investigating speed, velocity and acceleration through multiple labs involving sports and hot wheels cars. Acceleration led into studying Newton's Three Laws of Motion. Students completed hands on lab stations to inquire how each law worked in the physical world and performed a series of labs investigating each of the individual Newton's Laws in depth. This unit culminated with a Newton's Laws' project where each student had to illustrate and write about their individual understanding of Newton's Three Laws.
- SPANISH: Spanish students are readying to take the National Spanish Exam and compete with thousands of students across Virginia and the country.
 - Over the second quarter, in Spanish 1 part 1, students were given the task to create a profile of themselves using all the grammar rules learned this year. Students used Chromebooks and created an 'overview' of themselves indicating who they are, what they're like, and what they enjoy doing. It was a rewarding experience.
 - In Spanish 1 part 2, students spent time learning about homes in Ecuador and other Latin American nations. Then, using our classroom vocabulary and incorporating new words on their own, they each designed detailed floor plans of their ideal homes. They labeled every item and room in Spanish. The students' creativity was a highlight of the project.
 - In Spanish 2, students participated in a 'virtual soccer championship' using the Smartboard in the classroom. While matches were going on, students in the audience were sports reporters taking notes and creating post-game commentary for their Sports Podcast they recorded using their Smartphones and/or Chromebooks. Students were able to listen to other podcasts and discuss them in Spanish. It was an awesome experience for students to apply what they are learning in class.
- Latin students are busy preparing for four contests this coming term; all Latin students will take the National Myth and Latin exams, while interested students will take the Classical Association of Virginia's Grammar Tournament and the challenging Medusa Mythology Exam. During the second quarter, students continued to investigate the cultural and mythological aspects of the ancient world in addition to their language studies. Latin Part 1 students completed mythological trading cards as a way of gathering and extending their knowledge about Greek and Roman mythology in preparation for the National Myth Exam. Latin Part 2 students created and illustrated their own Latin mottos; they also each wrote English essays explaining why they chose their mottos. As part of their studies, Latin 2 students designed menus for authentic Roman banquets and completed creative work showing knowledge about the Underworld.